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ABSTRACT

To function effectively in crosscultural settings, international consultants, development specialists, and trainers should be prepared to examine objectively a number of personal qualities. Problems arise in crosscultural relationships when either the client or the consultant fails to identify objectives, fails to accommodate different views of freedom of choice, proposes or expects too rapid change, fails to recognize errors, attempts to "go native," or adopts a "missionary" attitude. Consultants should consider the following guidelines for crosscultural relationships: (1) foster trust, communication, and cooperation with the client; (2) recognize the nature and limits of expertise; (3) be aware of personal motivations and biases; (4) be well-grounded in theory, but recognize that it must be translated into application and action; (5) have a thorough knowledge of one's own culture; (6) be well-grounded in cross cultural knowledge and sensitivity, not just the language; (7) accept different values, customs, and practices, and be able to work within such contexts; (8) be able to deal with ambiguity, frustration, and even rejection or failure; (9) attempt to reach and experience the operational levels of the client organization; and (10) understand that the product is intangible, and evaluation of effects may be difficult or delayed. (HTH)

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THE INTERNATIONAL CONSULTANT: SUBSTANCE AND CULTURE

Dr. Thorrel B. Fest

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Speech Communication Association (Seattle, WA, February 16-21, 1984). Appears in "Saudi Business," May 28, 1984, under the title "Cross-Cultural Knowledge: A Necessity for International Consultants."

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THE INTERNATIONAL CONSULTANT:SUBSTANCE AND CULTURE

Dr. Thorrel B. Fest

Are you helping or are you part of the problem? Every international consultant, development specialist and trainer should ask himself that question when working in a cross cultural situation.The many opportunities arising from real needs have yet to be matched by appropriate preparation and orientation to equip such specialists to go beyond their substantive expertise deal effectively with the unique nature of cultures and peoples. Substantive problems are everywhere evident. Problems of nutrition and hunger, public services and education are increasing in frequency and severity. Both national and international stability are threatenedby economic imbalances and dislocations. Third World efforts at development require both capital and technological transfers while at the same time generating major cultural changes.Multinational corporations are discovering that policies and projects conceived in an international headquarters must be adapted to and interpreted in the cultures of distant subsidiaries. Quite predictably a wide and varied collection of individuals and organizationsoffer special services and promises of solutions. Both consultants and clients are well advised to approach the relationships and expectations thoughtfully and realistically.

It is important to understand that the consulting field is open to all who assert their avalibility and competence. Anyone can claim to be a consultant and many do. The terms has been so used as to lose any specificity of meaning. There are few if any programs designed to prepare the practitioner. There are no defined criteria that must be met or credentials that must be acquired. The tests are perceived personal credibility and some demonstrated competence in the area of specialization. Substantive competence may be examined quite readily by reviewing training and experience as well as possible certification. But the equally important component of human interaction, communication and particularly cross cultural knowledge and skills is frequently ignored or left to chance. A host of mismanaged cross cultural relationships illustrate the human and financial cost of such neglect.

A client organization normally asks two questions. First, do we need a consultant with another cultural background? Second, what assistance can we expect to receive? The answers often fail to consider the nature of the fit involving the consultant, the problem, the organization and the culture. What ever the client considerations, the consultant has a responsibility to ask himself a number of questions related to the potential relationship. Do I possess the requisite substantive abilities to address the client's expressed needs? Do I possess the requisite cross cultural knowledge and skills to contribute effectively

within the given organizational and cultural framework? Is there a reasonable expectation of making a constructive contribution to the client organization?

To function effectively in cross cultural settings, a consultant should be prepared to examine objectively a number of personal qualities to which we seldom give attention. A partial list includes such items as a thorough understanding of one's own culture, an analysis of one's motivations,an awareness of the effects of ethnocentricism, flexibility in accepting the values and customs of other cultures, sensitivity to non-verbal behaviors and patience in seeking to understand other peoples and their ways of life. The list could be extended. Butneither need nor opportunity will wait for the full personal mastery of every area of skill and knowledge. Much of a consultant's learning must be "on the job training."To some degree that is inevitable, for what is accepted custom in Houston, may be unacceptable in Cairo and offensive in Shanghi.

Both clients and consultants will find their cross cultural relationships more pleasant, productive and profitable by recognizing some common problems that may arise, and observing some general guidelines that can enhance the productivity of their work. As stated these are directed to the consultant. Only a slight modification of language is necessary to render them equally useful to the client.

COMMON PROBLEMS

1. Failing to identify the actual client and/or the true objective(s). Who are the actual decisionmakers? Can and will the client state the objectives clearly and specifically? Are they intended to be cosmetic or significant?
2. Failing to accommodate different views of freedom of choice and man's ultimate responsibilities. To what degree do we believe individuals are subject to forces beyond their control? If so, in what areas? How free are we to shape our personal lives? Can and should we persue personal goals or do we have primary responsibilities and obligations to others?
3. Mistaking communication for goodwill. Is there resistance or resentment on the part of local personnel? Does courtesy constitute acceptance?
4. Continuing the use of inappropriate methods and activities. Are the contributions of each step and procedure to the major goal valid and clear?
5. Proposing or expecting too rapid change. Does the real or perceived need to demonstrate early positive results conflict with the developing readiness for change?
6. Fostering client dependency.Has the initial symbosis become parasitic? At what stage should the client befree of consultant support?

7. Failing to recognize and acknowledge errors.Are both parties sufficiently secure to admit and correct mistakes in analysis, recommendations and activities?
8. Attempting to "go native". Does the consultant understand the respective roles and relationships with respect to himself , the client and the culture?
9. Vie ing for credit and leadership in programs of change.Can the consultant understand that organizational improvement is primary and personal ego gratification is secondary?
10. Adopting a "missionary" attitude. Does the consultant attempt to advance unacceptable values, b eliefs and attitudes and/or unacceptable technology?

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES

1. The consultant's primary function is to help the client. That is only possible when there is mutual trust, communication and cooperation.
2. The consultant must be ethical and honest at all times. Recognize the nature and limits of your expertise.Beware of extra-legal arrangements. You represent not only your self and your organization but also your country.
3. Know yourself, your motivations, your abilities, you biases and your limitations. If you are uncertain as to your competence seek help or decline the appointment.
4. Be well grounded in theory, but recognize that it must be translated into application and action.Be guided by the Chinese proverb,"Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Involve me and I understand."
5. Have a thorough knowledge of your own culture as a bases for understanding and relating to other cultures
6. Cross cultural knowledge and sensitivity may be more important than specific linguistic fluency. Language mastery is an asset, but its absence is not fatal. Be informed about the host culture's history, customs, values, religion(s), art, music,political systems, educational system(s , minority groups, work ethic and family structures. Assess the attitude toward change. Determine the degree to which the society fosters an Individuality System or a Responsibility System.
7. Be able to accept different values, customs and practices and be able to work within such a context. Recognize that others often see your society as peculiar or marked by inconsistencies.
8. Be able to deal with ambiguity, frustration and even rejection or failure.
9. Attempt to reach and experience the operational levels of the client organization. The reality of seeing may be different from only hearing. The behavior levels reflect the cultural and human elements with which you must deal.
10. Understand that you product is intangible and sometimes ephemeral. The impact may be delayed. You may constitute a threat. Your effect may be negative.True evaluation may be difficult and is often delayed.

A FEW USEFUL RESOURCES

Condon, John & F.S. Yousef. AN INTRODUCTION TO INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION, Indianapolis, Ind. Bobbs-Merril, 1975

Argyris, Chris. INTERVENTION THEORY AND METHOD, Reading, Mass. Addison-Wesley, 1973

Hall, Edward T. THE SILENT LANGUAGE, Garden City, N.Y. Doubleday, 1959

----- THE HIDDEN DIMENSION, Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1969

Hepworth, Janice & T.B. Fest. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION, Boulder, Co. University of Colorado, 1975

Hoopes, David. READINGS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION, Pittsburg, Pa., University of Pittsburg, 1971-72-

INTERNATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION ANNUAL, Annandale, Va. Speech Communication Association, (Published each year)

Lippitt, Gordon & D.S. Hoopes. HELPING ACROSS CULTURES, Washington, International Consultants Foundation, 1978

Lippitt, Gordon & Ronald Lippitt. THE CONSULTING PROCESS IN ACTION, LaJolla, CA. University Associates, 1978

Niehoff, Arthur H. A CASE BOOK OF SOCIAL CHANGE, Chicago, Aldine, 1966

Robbins, J.G. & T.B. Fest. CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND THE TRAINER, Boulder, Co., Spectrum III, 1546 Sunset Blvd., 1976

Rogers, Everett and Floyd Shoemaker. COMMUNICATION OF INNOVATIONS: A CROSS-CULTURAL APPROACH, New York, The Free Press, 1971

Rudolph, Evan and B.R. Johnson, COMMUNICATION CONSULTING, Annandale, VA., SCA, 1983

Schein, Edgar H. PROCESS CONSULTATION, Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley, 1969

General: Read materials on cultural anthropology, organization theory, management, conflict, leadership, training, organizational development, human resource development.

Specifically: Be informed about a society's history, customs, values, religion, political system, educational system, family structures, pressures for change, minorities, work ethic, art and music. Try to determine the degree to which it is an Individuality System or a Responsibility System. Know as much as you can. Some of the mass will be useful.

MATRIX OF ORGANIZATIONAL VARIABLES

ACTIVITIES	SIDO	IFTDO	ODI/RODC	ICF	EIT	IIOSD	CCI	SIETAR	SID	IMF	ICQWL
INTERNATIONAL MEMBERSHIP*	XXX	XXX	XX	XX	X		XX	XX	XXX	XX	XXX
INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS/ PROJECT	XXX	X?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
NOT FOR PROFIT	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XX	X
OVERLAPPING COUNCIL OR ADVISORY BOARD	XXX	X	XX	?	?	?	?	X	?	?	XXX
OWN JOURNAL	XXX	?	XXX	?	?	?	?	XXX	XXX	XXX	?
OWN NEWSLETTER	X	XX	XXX	?	?	?	?	?	XX	?	X
OWN INTERNATIONAL CONF	XXX	XXX	XXX	XX	?	?	?	?	?	XXX	XXX
DOES RESEARCH	XX	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
OFFERS CONSULTANCY	X	?	?	XXX		XX	?	?	?	?	?
HAS TEACHING PROGRAMS (Diplomas/Degrees)	XXX	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
HAS A MEMBERSHIP (ENTRY QUALIFICATION)	X	X	XX	XX	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
SUPPORTS THE ODP, CODE OF ETHICS	XXX		XXX	XXX	?	?	XXX	XXX	?	?	?
FINANCIALLY SOUND	XX		XX	?							

* Operating in at least 10 countries

IFTDO International Federation of Training & Development Organizations
ODI/RODC Organization Development Institute/Registry of OD Consultants
ICF International Consultants Foundation
EIT European Institute for Trans National Studies in Grop & OD
IIOSD International Institute of Organization and Social Development
CCI Certified Consultants International
SIETAR Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research
SID Society for International Development
IMF International Management Foundation
ICQWL International Council for Quality of Work-life